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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Bay Area Health Officers Urge Boosters to Protect Against Omicron Variant

Public health agencies across the Bay Area urge everyone eligible to get vaccinated and, if eligible, get a booster shot right away to protect against the rapidly spreading Omicron variant.

Widely available via appointment or drop-in sites, boosters maintain the power of vaccines to strongly protect against severe illness and death from COVID-19. Everyone should get one when eligible, but particularly those over 50 or those with significant underlying health conditions.

Get one if you are at least 16 years old and:

- 6 months have passed since your second dose of Moderna (for 18+)
- 6 months have passed since your second dose of Pfizer (for 16+)
- 2 months have passed since your Johnson & Johnson Dose (for 18+)

Public health officials in the counties of Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Monterey, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Santa Cruz, Solano, Sonoma as well as the City of Berkeley encourage anyone eligible who needs a booster dose to get one as soon as possible.

To find a booster shot appointment, contact your health care provider or a local chain pharmacy, or visit myturn.ca.gov.

Currently, 50 percent of eligible Alameda County residents have received a booster, and approximately 240,000 residents who are 50 years and over have yet to get their booster shot.

While there is no evidence of local transmission of Omicron in Alameda County yet, cases have been detected.

Many more cases of Omicron are expected to be reported in the coming days and weeks, and, based on the exponential growth in cases being seen in Europe, there is a significant risk of exponential growth in COVID-19 cases in our region. The United Kingdom currently has more COVID-19 cases than at any time during the 2-year pandemic. Other highly vaccinated countries that mirror the Bay Area's high vaccination rates, such as Denmark and Norway, are predicting Omicron will become the dominant variant in a matter of days.

Evidence suggests that Omicron spreads more rapidly than other variants, and more is being learned every day. Although some evidence suggests that a lower percentage of people infected with Omicron may be hospitalized and die, if a surge causes many thousands of new cases per day, even a small percentage of that total entering our hospitals will overwhelm healthcare delivery systems.

“Everyone due for a booster dose should get one as soon as they can,” said Dr. Nicholas Moss, Health Officer for Alameda County. “The added protection of a booster will be needed to reduce infections and prevent severe illness this winter.”

In addition to vaccinations and boosters, masking, testing, ventilation, and distancing remain an effective multi-layered defense against COVID-19. As the holiday season is upon us, people should stay mindful of risks and take steps to decrease them.

If people must travel or gather for the holidays:

- Anyone who develops symptoms of COVID-19 should isolate themselves and get tested as soon as possible.
- Get tested before gathering or traveling, upon return, and again 3-5 days later.
- Have everyone ages 5+ get their COVID-19 vaccine and booster if eligible.
- Take advantage of quick and easy home test kits available in pharmacies and stores.
- Wear a mask indoors and in crowded settings.
- Keep group gatherings small. Gather with close family units.
- Outside gatherings are safer than indoor gatherings.
- Be particularly cautious around elderly or immunocompromised individuals and consider COVID-19 testing before such interactions.

Parents of very young children and those who have not been vaccinated should make sure to take all advised precautions. Avoid large gatherings. Always wear a mask in indoor public settings (unless under age 2).

Vaccinations are available at no cost to the public, insurance is not required, and there are no immigration requirements. Visit <https://covid-19.acgov.org/vaccines> to learn more.

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